



## **Rationale**

At St Mary's Coptic Orthodox College the welfare of all students is paramount. As a school, we are aware that a number of children may be affected by asthma either due to a pre-existing condition or for the first time and, therefore, staff need to know the appropriate action to be taken in an asthma attack. The following background information is provided in support of the rationale of this policy.

## **Background Information:**

Asthma is a condition that affects the air tubes of the lungs. An asthma attack occurs when a 'trigger factor' causes the air tubes to overreact and narrow in some people so that breathing is difficult. These 'trigger factors' can vary from person to person but may include colds/flu/chest infections, exercise, pollens, dust, dust mites, temperature change, cigarette smoke. Symptoms of asthma include:

- difficulty in breathing or breathlessness
- wheezing or coughing
- tightness in the chest
- difficulty in speaking.

These symptoms are particularly likely to occur *during or immediately after exercise*.

## **Asthma Medication:**

There are four main groups of asthma medications: *relievers, preventers, symptom controllers* and *combination medications*.

### **Reliever medications:**

Should be easily accessible at all times to students who suffer from asthma. Common brands include Blue Puffer, Airomir, Asmol, Epaq and Bricanyl.

### **Preventer medications:**

Help reduce and prevent inflammation in the lining of the air tubes. These include, but are not restricted to: Intal, Intal Forte, Tilade, Becotide, Becloforte, Respocort, Qvar, Pulmicort and Flixotide. Preventer medications do not relieve an asthma attack.

### **Symptom controllers:**

Are long lasting relievers used in combination with reliever and preventer medication.

### **Combination medications:**

Combine a preventer and a symptom controller in one device, e.g. Seretide and Symbicort.

Symptom controllers and combination medications do not relieve an asthma attack and **are not usually used at school.**

### **AIMS**

- To provide a policy of asthma management that focuses upon prevention as the priority.
- To provide a process for the proper asthma management of students and staff within the school.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **Parent/Guardian Responsibilities**

- Parents/guardians are responsible for ensuring that their children have an adequate supply of the appropriate medication at school and advised that a **spacer** be at school for their child where appropriate. A spacer assists in the administering of medications making sure that the inhaled medication gets to the airways.
- Where a child is deemed to have asthma the parents/guardians must supply an asthma management plan to the school on an annual basis. This plan can only be developed and completed by the child's medical practitioner.

#### **First Aid Supplies**

The asthma first aid supplies at St Mary's Coptic Orthodox College include:

- a reliever puffer (a hand-held inhaler device such as Blue Puffer or Bricanyl - these are blue in colour),
- a large volume spacer,
- instructions on how to use the medications and devices plus steps to be taken in an acute asthma attack (individual and school action plans) – Appendix 1
- alcohol swabs to clean devices after use.

The expiry date on the blue puffer and the amount of medication left, will be checked regularly by the staff responsible for first aid.

#### **Prevention, Assessment and Treatment**

Exercise for students with asthma is encouraged to improve cardiovascular fitness and general well being. However, exercise can bring on an attack and often occurs after the exercise in the 'cooling down' period. Exercise-induced asthma can frequently be prevented by a simple warm-up period and taking a blue reliever puffer and/or other medication as recommended by their doctor, immediately before the exercise. Exercise should immediately cease if symptoms occur followed by rest and taking the blue reliever puffer. Exercise can continue if symptoms disappear but if they persist, worsen or re-appear the attack needs to be managed and the student must not return to the exercise.

The severity of asthma attacks can be classed as follows:

- Mild - coughing, soft wheeze, minor difficulty in breathing and no difficulty speaking in sentences.
- Moderate - persistent cough, loud wheeze, obvious difficulty in breathing and able to speak in short sentences only.
- Severe - student is often distressed or anxious, gasping for breath, unable to speak more than a few words, pale and sweaty and may have blue lips.

## **Emergency Treatment**

**All students judged to be having a severe attack require emergency medical treatment. The following procedure should be followed:**

- Have at least two First Aid staff in attendance.
- Call an ambulance stating clearly that a student is having an asthma attack and carry out asthma first aid whilst waiting for the ambulance to arrive. The parents/guardians will be contacted immediately after calling the ambulance and the incident recorded. The child should not be left alone even if there is a complete recovery. If the student has an asthma action plan follow the steps immediately.
- If no individual action plan is available, normal asthma protocol should be used immediately. These steps are clearly displayed in the First Aid Room, along with posters, so all staff are well versed with them.
- If the student's own reliever puffer is not readily available, a reliever puffer should be used from the first aid kit or borrowed from another student/staff member. It does not matter if a different brand of reliever is used.
- Regardless of the severity of the attack, asthma first aid needs to commence immediately.

## **First Time Asthma Attacks**

- In the situation of a first time asthma attack a student is to be administered four separate puffs of a blue reliever puffer via a spacer and an ambulance is to be called immediately.
- Four separate puffs should be given every four minutes until the ambulance arrives.
- Reliever puffers are extremely safe even if the student does not end up having asthma.
- The child's parents/guardians should be contacted immediately.

## **EVALUATION**

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school policy review cycle, and as required by the Asthma Foundation, to maintain accreditation as part of the Asthma Friendly School program.

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